

THE WHITE HOUSE 2001 PROJECT
NOMINATION FORMS ONLINE
REPORT NO. 1

OPPORTUNITIES AND HAZARDS
THE WHITE HOUSE INTERVIEW PROGRAM

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This is a report sent September 30th 1997 to The Pew Charitable Trusts. It summarizes my findings from a consultancy grant from Pew I had this summer to research the need for a program to close the information gap between what incoming White House staff know and what they need to know as they prepare to govern. The report describes the nature of transition problems and suggests how the White House Interview Program can provide incoming staff with needed materials in a format appropriate to their information needs.

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REPORT

OPPORTUNITIES AND HAZARDS

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THE PROBLEM

A WHITE HOUSE NOT PREPARED TO GOVERN

“The White House is not simply a spoil of victory,” observed Harrison Wellford, a former White House official and specialist on presidential transitions.¹ “It’s the nerve center of the greatest government in the world and we ought to at least give it the same respect that you do when you take over a second-rate corporation.” Wellford, currently a lawyer specializing in mergers and acquisitions, noted: “When I compare White House transitions and the lack of systems and discipline and preparation that goes into that to what we

“You would never start up a company the way people start a White House....”

do when we are taking over a company, it is night and day and, yet, the stakes are so infinitely smaller with the companies than with the White House.” The same observation is made by others who have

worked in the White House and devoted time and energy to transitions. “You would never start up a company the way people start a White House,” observed Roy Neel, who was Chief of Staff for Vice-President Gore and later served President Clinton as Deputy Chief of Staff.² Neel and Thomas (Mack) McLarty, Clinton Chief of Staff, were the only senior White House staff who were appointed more than one week prior to the President’s Inauguration. With these two exceptions, the names of the Clinton White House senior staff were publicly announced on January 14, 1993, giving them less than a week prior to the Inauguration for them to acclimate to their new roles and to discover the dimensions of their posts. When they did come into the building, they were faced with no institutional memory of previous decisions reached, organizational structures selected, and policies adopted; no outline of their responsibilities; no manual to show how the place worked in preceding administrations.

Life in the White House can be a rough battle for survival from the day one enters the Executive grounds. “You come in and you’re already out there scavenging for the infrastructure, physical and intellectual,” noted Michael Jackson, who served as Cabinet Secretary in the Bush White House.³ Jackson

¹ Interview with Harrison Wellford, August 26, 1997, Washington, D.C.

² Interview with Roy Neel, July 18, 1997, Washington, D.C.

³ Interview with Michael Jackson, July 8, 1997, Alexandria, Virginia.

pointed out that when you come into the White House there is literally no furniture in your office. You must compete for it, just as in the succeeding days and months ahead you must grab for so many other things you want, including often what responsibilities you will have. “The first day what they did is they pulled out a lot of the furniture from the offices and into the halls where there were piles of credenzas, desks, wing chairs,” Jackson related about his search for furnishings in the Old Executive Office Building. “The people who were smart and knew the drill, got there early and went and just took stuff,” he said. Just as with finding the prime furniture, those in a White House who are resourceful are the ones who prosper. “The good scavengers find both the physical and intellectual infrastructure as well as the background and support they need, and the ones who are not proactive and aggressive search it out, invent it on their own, or wait for someone to send them the material,” he observed.

The uncertainty of the transition period, beginning with the victory of the President-elect and ending after the first hundred days following his inauguration, often translates into a lost opportunity for the new team. Momentum not seized during these months represents a special loss because the President and his new team have an almost unparalleled opportunity to achieve early program results. Yet because of the poor start-up arrangements for a White House, it is rare for an administration to make effective use of the time. “The early months are so important,” observed David Gergen, a senior official in four White Houses. “Because that’s when you have the most authority, but that’s when you also have the least capacity for making the right decisions.”⁴ The early months represent an interval when a President’s critics are not likely to publicly criticize him while his allies organize around him providing him with their support. There is public interest in what arrangements and proposals he is considering and how he plans to convert his campaign pledges into official policy.

“The early months are so important, because that’s when you have the most authority, but that’s when you also have the least capacity for making the right decisions.”

Yet it proves difficult for those in almost every White House to make full use of their opportunities because they rarely come in prepared to direct the government and to develop policy positions. Instead, they are organized around the campaign just completed, not for what governing challenges lie ahead for them. The momentum produced by the campaign just completed and by the entreaties of those seeking presidential support for policies, people, and programs, forms a vortex that a President and his team can easily get swept into if they do not have in place a staff trained in the ways a White House works and one prepared to govern with a clear agenda. Making effective use of the six month period between the election and the 100 day mark is a necessary step in bringing about an effective national government. The White House is no place for staff who fail to understand the value of the good will found at the beginning of a presidential term and who also do not appreciate its time dated nature.

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⁴ Interview with David Gergen, June 24, 1997, Washington, D.C.

THE NEED TO MAKE EFFECTIVE USE OF THE TRANSITION PERIOD

THE OPPORTUNITIES

A Suspension of Partisanship: Good Will and Its Evanescence. The early months in a presidential term are like no other. “There is a coming together after an election that is a natural and wonderful impulse in America,” observed James Cicconi, former White House Staff Secretary and Deputy Chief of Staff in the Bush Administration.⁵ “Where you want to wish the new guy well whether you voted for him or not, and you want to give him the benefit of the doubt initially. So there is a period where there is almost a suspension of partisanship, a knowing suspension of it and where a sense of fair play enters in.” The forces, institutions, and people that come together to wish a President well are national in scope. “For whatever reason, you have a honeymoon with the press and with interest groups too,” noted Phil Brady, former Deputy White House Chief of Staff and Staff Secretary in the Bush years.⁶ “They are not locked in against you on this side or that. Even if they were against you during the campaign. They are now willing to say ‘for the next four years we want to work with you.’ Congress is the same thing. The members of the opposite party too. So you do have a unique period across the board. You have it with the mayors, with the governors, and the public.”

“You really can get a lot done if you have a very clear agenda and have set priorities that are commensurate with the political capital you want to spend.”

Democrats and Republicans agree that an administration needs to make use of its precious political capital and that President Ronald Reagan was the most effective of modern presidents in doing so. “Just by virtue of winning you have a lot of advantages in terms of an inspired democratic electorate,” said Roy Neel. “It gives you a lot of wiggle room and a lot of resources.”⁷ But, observed Michael Jackson, “it doesn’t take long for it to erode.” Consequently, the early goodwill is a resource to be contemporaneously spent, not just husbanded for an uncertain future occasion. “The capital that you have at the beginning is so precious and to not get full benefit from it, because clearly it’s going to erode after awhile, is a tragic loss,” remarked Harrison Wellford.⁸ “You really can get a lot done if you have a very clear agenda and have set priorities that are commensurate with the political capital you want to spend. And for the most part Reagan did that.” In order to successfully set the agenda as he did, Ronald Reagan began early preparing to govern.

Using Campaign Time to Prepare the Way for Governing. There is adequate opportunity and flexibility in campaign organizations for presidential candidates to prepare the way for governing. In Spring 1980, Ronald Reagan chose a small group of people to begin their transition effort. With Pendleton James

There is adequate opportunity and flexibility in campaign organizations for presidential candidates to prepare the way for governing

assembling information on possible appointees, the team gradually gathered staff people interested in issues related to governing rather than campaigning. “In one sense you want

⁵ Interview with James Cicconi, Philip Brady, and Andrew Card, September 19, 1997, Washington, D.C.

⁶ Interview with James Cicconi, Philip Brady, and Andrew Card, September 19, 1997, Washington, D.C.

⁷ Interview with Roy Neel, July 18, 1997, Washington, D.C.

⁸ Interview with Harrison Wellford, August 26, 1997, Washington, D.C.

to keep it fairly separate because you don't want people tripping over themselves discussing what they're going to get or what they're not going to get after the campaign," observed Edwin Harper, Assistant to the President for Policy Development and a key Reagan transition staff member.⁹ By having one basic group dealing with the transition, you establish clear lines of authority for transition decisions. "The biggest single barrier to using the information that's there is lack of clarity as to who's in charge of getting the White House organization tasks done," noted Harrison Wellford. "If you have responsibility scattered among several competing groups, there's a lack of cooperation among people. There is an effort for each person to sequester his own expert with little sharing." The advantage of having one group with authority stretches beyond the campaign into the formal transition period. In an environment of unclear lines of transition responsibility, staff energy "is focused on internal politics and trying to see who's going to get what office rather than standing back from a position of confidence and thinking, 'What is in the best interest of the President,'" observed Wellford.

Taking Advantage of the Interregnum. With two and a half months of an interregnum between the election and the assumption of power by the President-elect and his team, there is adequate time for a transition operation of three or four key people appointed in the first week following the election to explore different methods of setting up their White House structure and to staff its remaining senior, deputy, and assistant slots. In the transition into the Reagan Administration, for example, the President's top lieutenants were chosen fairly soon after the election. James Baker was named Chief of Staff within the first week following the election and he in turn recruited a staff two levels below him.

With a top level staff in place soon after the election, the President-elect and his small team had the opportunity to prepare the way for the coming months. Together the new team "had regular transition meetings that were pointed not just at what was going on in the transition but at planning out the first three months," noted David Gergen.¹⁰ During these days the policy people worked on the outlines of their legislative initiatives and David Gergen worked with Dick Werthlin on a hundred day plan designed to plot out the policy and supporting communications planning for the new President's two central initiatives: budget cuts and tax cuts. "But it was only because we had the luxury of knowing who was going where that we could do that and then go to the President with it," observed Gergen. With a small contingent in place, the new team had the opportunity to develop a plan and then to work through it with the President. Their early organizational work led to tangible legislative policy victories achieved during their first year in office. Former staff members who worked for President Bush talked about the valuable time their transition bought them because they used the time to work through with the President the nature of their jobs and how he wanted his staff to treat issues, the paper coming to him, and the people in the political process with whom he would regularly meet.

Harnessing the Momentum Produced by Victory. In order to establish a hold on the executive departments, early attention by the transition team is a top priority. Once you win, there is a momentum that you can use to your advantage as you seek to control the government. "And in the Reagan transition there was an excellent sense of momentum going forward," said Edwin Harper. Particularly in the area of personnel, they used their momentum to persuade people to join their team. With the advantage of an operation organized early and with information gathered on all of the President's positions, they were in a position to interview potential nominees to administrative positions and make sure they supported the President's

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⁹ Interview with Edwin Harper, August 18, 1997, Falls Church, Virginia.

¹⁰ Interview with David Gergen, June 24, 1997, Washington, D.C.

positions. "We prepared briefing books based on everything that was said in the election for the new Cabinet officers," Harper related. "So as they were appointed, my staff and I briefed each of them on, 'Here's what the president has said. If you accept this assignment, your job is to carry out what the President has promised the American people he was going to do. If you've got any questions about that we ought to discuss it right now.'" Having in place a staff poised to govern, related research work accomplished, and a personnel scouting team doing its work well before the election, once Ronald Reagan won the election the President-elect could make the most of the momentum engendered by his win.

Taking Advantage of the Established Rhythms of a Year. For those who understand the recurring patterns of a political year and of a presidency, there is long range planning that can be effectively accomplished in the weeks following the election. "We knew what our policy agenda for the year was," said Harper. "We knew we had to get the messages up basically before June

The President's year has a rhythm to it that the White House can harness.

because otherwise by June, they're not going to hold hearings or anything else and we didn't want to step on our own lines." So they worked on getting policy and personnel initiatives up to Capitol Hill "in an orderly fashion so it doesn't screw up what you've done the week before and sets the stage or doesn't interfere with what you're going to do the next week." When you use a calendar to plot an administration's dealings with the Congress, "the agenda is pretty well defined and you have the Congress waiting for it." What a new President and his team must do is "to step lively on that," said Harper. In order for the initiatives to be effective, the relevant departments must be involved in the legislative process, which means even more planning must be done up front in the early days. In President Reagan's case, the organizational work made the difference between spending their first year moving the government in the direction they wished rather than using the time to find out how the national government actually works, which was the position more than one recent White House found itself in in its first year in office.

An Available Pool of Experts on Presidential Governance. One of the advantages a President-elect traditionally has in our political system is a large base of people with White House experience who are willing to provide information on previous administrations and to organize the transition effort for the new team. Both the Democratic and Republican parties have a pool of people coming forward who have experience in transitions and in White House operations. Some, such as veteran White House aide Clark Clifford, who organized the transition operation for President-elect John Kennedy, take on the transition task only after making clear they want no White House post for themselves. Taking themselves out of the contest for an administration post means they will not direct their energy towards carving out their own White House niche. In addition to individuals who organize a transition, there are others who are ready to provide expertise in specific organization and policy areas.

There also is a pool of people with previous White House experience who can be brought into an administration. "The main point is to have some adult leadership from the get-go," observed former White House aide William Galston.¹¹ "A

"A database across time is no substitute for someone who's been there before and is going back."

database across time is no substitute for someone who's been there before and is going back." Such people are available, but how many of them are willing to come into a new

administration depends in part on how long it has been since the party of the President-elect held power and

¹¹ Interview with William Galston, June 5, 1997, College Park, Maryland.

whether that administration was viewed as successful or as a failure. When President Clinton took office he had a much smaller pool of available former staff members to choose from among than did Republican Presidents in recent administrations. It was twelve years since the Democrats last held the presidency. The Republicans did not have the same distance between administrations. George Bush followed Ronald Reagan who came into office only four years after the Republican party last held the presidency. When twelve years have elapsed since a party last held the office, few people are available as those who previously served generally have positions they want to hold onto and, twelve years older, they have little taste for the long hours and competitive environment found in a White House.

THE HAZARDS

Passing the Information Torch: Traditionally An Imperfect Pass. Since formal transitions first began with the passing of power from the administration of President Harry Truman to that of President Dwight Eisenhower, there has been a sense that the transition most often represents an occasion of lost opportunities. Those leaving the White House traditionally prepare materials for those coming in as do the members of the transition team for the new President. Yet most often these efforts do not result in a White House staff informed about the nature of its work and the dimensions of the patterns of White House organization. There have been seven formal transitions of power (Eisenhower, Kennedy, Nixon, Carter, Reagan, Bush, and Clinton) where following the presidential election the incoming team had the opportunity to work together with the incumbents to purposefully prepare for their assumption of power. *Taking the most recent administrations beginning with Richard Nixon, there is a checkered history to their transitions.* Taking the most recent administrations beginning with Richard Nixon, there is a checkered history to their transitions. There is one clear success story (Ronald Reagan) two rough starts (Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton), and two transitions (Richard Nixon and George Bush) with mixed results.

While there is information provided by those who leave as well as a team selected by the President-elect, their efforts do not ordinarily result in a smooth takeover. When there is a “hostile takeover” with the incoming team having defeated those soon to leave, there is a tendency for the winners to regard with suspicion any information coming from those who lost. “There is an extraordinary hubris which affects every administration that ousts an incumbent,” remarked Harrison Wellford. “That’s the highest of the highs.” Even if they had attentively listened to what the departing Bush staff had to tell them, the Clinton staff were not in place for their counterparts to go through what they learned in their years in the White House. The problems of the Clinton White House were compounded by having people attend the transition meetings who were not appointed to the jobs under discussion. Because President Clinton waited to appoint the senior staff until the final week prior to the inauguration, by that time many of their counterparts in the Bush White House had already left their posts. From the viewpoint of one Clinton White House staff member, the result was that the incoming “people were flying blind.” Harrison Wellford pointed out that “even though there was some very good work done in preparation for their term, there wasn’t a consumer really for it.” People simply were not appointed in time to take advantage of the available briefings and briefing materials.

Even when it is a “friendly takeover”, there are problems if the staff is not appointed until late or if the President believes he wants to establish a system with a different emphasis. The President and his new staff talk to those people whose functions they wish to replicate and avoid dealing with those representing staff areas that are not the strength of the new Chief Executive. President Bush and his staff, for example, almost totally avoided gathering information about the communications operation created by President Reagan.

When information is provided by the outgoing team, those coming in tend to view the information through the prism of the two presidents rather than viewing the operation as a total organizational structure responding to the continuing needs of a President and his staff.

Swept by Campaign Momentum. When a campaign has ended successfully with the candidate elected to the presidency, the campaign momentum does not halt there. In fact, it maintains its speed and energy.

The result of bringing your campaign team into your White House is a partisan operation that cannot make effective use of the period of a suspension of partisanship.

Instead of being aimed at the election, though, it redirects itself towards moving the campaign apparatus into the White House. “There is some built in momentum that sweeps people along from important positions in a campaign structure into the White House,” noted William Galston, who worked in both the 1992 Clinton campaign and then in the White House in the first two years of Clinton’s term. “The general problem is that it is very difficult to tell people who worked their hearts out for you for two years during a presidential campaign that, ‘Elections are one thing and governance another,’” he said. “And your youthful zeal, your ‘take no prisoners’ political skills were just what we needed then, but this is something different. That’s enormously difficult to do.” An administration pays a high price when it allows the campaign staff to assume the major White House senior staff positions. The result of bringing your campaign team into your White House is a partisan operation that cannot make effective use of the period of a suspension of partisanship.

Political scientist and White House veteran Richard E. Neustadt observed that the youthful crowd that characteristically comes into the building as the “new team” can be characterized by their “arrogance, ignorance, and adrenaline.” With little to restrain their zeal, the campaign staff can commit blunders that long haunt the President and those who follow the first wave of staff members. Craig Livingstone, who worked in the Clinton campaign and in the early years of the Clinton White House as the gatekeeper for security information on staff people, misused personnel files containing FBI background information on individuals serving in previous administrations. Now into its fifth year, the Clinton Administration continues to be dogged by Livingstone’s misuse of information. The matter remains before a congressional committee. Mistakes once made are difficult to correct.

Weak Management. Additionally, a team chosen for its political expertise generally is weak in management skills. “White Houses are notorious for being very weak on pure management skills,” noted Roy Neel.¹²

“You have a lot of smart people, people who have been in campaigns, lawyers, policy people. Very few people come into the White House who have strong management skills,” he said. “The tendency is to hire our political people.” Without a strong management team a White House can quickly slide into an administrative morass from which it is difficult to extricate itself. “One of the most important jobs in the White House is always given short shrift, and that’s the Assistant to the President for Administration,” noted Neel. “It is an absolutely critical thing because it’s a zero-defects operation,” he said. “You make a stupid little mistake in that area, it blows up on you - the Travel Office mess in this White House for example.”

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During the post-war period, several Democratic administrations caused trouble for their own White Houses by viewing the institution as a political campaign issue. Presidential candidates John Kennedy, Jimmy

¹² Interview with Roy Neel, July 18, 1997, Washington, D.C.

Carter, and Bill Clinton all promised during their campaigns to cut the White House staff by 25%. Once they came into office, it was difficult to change around presidential thinking on the issue, particularly when the staffs were dominated by people fresh from the campaign. Having run on the issue of cutting the staff, new members as well as their presidents were reluctant to retain a large staff. It was very difficult to alter the policy, except in the Kennedy Administration where the transition operation was headed by an experienced White House hand, Clark Clifford. As the man in charge of staffing the White House, Clifford had the standing to challenge the campaign view and provided the new team with a sense of the importance of White House staff as a resource for governing.

Momentum Captured by Executive Agencies. What can happen in the early months then is that “a lot of power shifts to the more permanent executive branch presence,” noted William Galston. In those early months when a transition has been particularly bumpy, career staff in agencies such as the Office of Management and Budget take on added importance as participants in the decision-making process on policy development and the subsequent legislative initiatives.

While effective in their work, the career staff outside of the White House are hard to see and hold responsible for the quality of an administration’s start. In addition, career officials may have an agenda quite different from that of the President-elect. When Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980, his transition staff made a major effort to get ahead of those in the bureaucracy who they believed would shape their budget for them. Since they regarded the budget as the bottom line on policy, having control over that instrument was a major element in their transition to power. When asked what he thought having an early start meant to them, Edwin Harper, who worked in the Reagan transition and White House operations, declared: “What it bought was that we were able to submit the budget frankly before the natives recaptured the front office,” he said.¹³ “All the Cabinet departments.” And they were very conscious of the need to press hard and press early if they wanted to have real control over the budget that would soon be sent down to the Congress. “It was a conscious effort and a strong push for me to join with Dave Stockman because I’d been in the Bureau of the Budget before and kind of knew the ropes to have us get started instantaneously and come through with the budget decisions where the obstacles to making tough choices would be minimized because everybody else hadn’t had a chance to dig in their positions,” Harper observed.

No Memory and No Training. The White House is an institution with great demands placed upon its officeholders, but at the same time it is a place with no institutional memory. Consider the position of the new staff member who must be prepared to make decisions relating to events abroad, policies at home, and executive actions within the government all based on current information. No background material is left by the departing team. When officials leave a White House, their belongings leave either with them or with materials to be packed away and sent to a presidential library. There is no intellectual floor plan left behind detailing how things are done and identifying what organizational patterns shape its operations and decisions.

Everywhere in Washington, you learn before you govern; in Congress, in the Courts, in the civil service. But not in the White House.

¹³ Interview with Edwin Harper, August 18, 1997, Falls Church, Virginia.

Having people on your transition team who served in a White House is one of the methods of building an institutional memory. “The only institutional memory that counts is what’s in somebody’s head,” observed William Galston.¹⁴ Those who have previously served have a sense of what information is important to bring to the table and what nuances it contains. White House Press Secretary Michael McCurry went through the materials prepared for press officers at the beginning of the Clinton Administration. “They had all the right information about how the external world impacts you, but none of the relevant information about how what you do and how your structure impacts your ability to get the job done,” he said.¹⁵ “Of course, anyone would have said, ‘Whatever you do, make sure the Press Secretary has the access necessary to accomplish the job.’” Someone who had served in a previous White House would have spotted the problems that would flow from having two people brief the press, Dee Dee Myers and George Stephanopoulos, with one of them, Stephanopoulos, a staff member involved in the development and passage of policy initiatives, and the only one of the two of them with walk-in access to the President.

The problems presented by a lack of institutional memory are compounded by a staff that has little White House training. “There are very few people in senior staff positions in the Congress who didn’t start out with junior staff positions in Congress,” observed William Galston.¹⁶ “There is a training process.” When you look at staff patterns at the White House, “the cycle of training and experience is broken and it’s as though you’re starting over again with each administration.” When the new President and his White House staff are people with little Washington and no White House experience, their problems are greater still for they have little sense of where to find information important to the tasks they are about to begin handling.

Missteps and Mistakes Are Difficult to Correct: Expansive Portfolios. The lack of White House experience of a new President and his team is directly connected to problems experienced by a new administration once it gets under way.

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An example of one persistent organizational problem found at the beginning of several recent administrations is the sought after appointee who demands a portfolio with an unrealistic breadth as a price of joining the White House staff. When the President and his top aides pursue their choices to fill staff positions, they sometimes make errors in providing people with a portfolio that in fact is too great to be effectively managed. Especially with people who have served at high levels in previous administrations, those persons keenly sought after can make bargains that in the long run are not to the administration’s advantage. In one recent White House, for example, a person bargained for four elements to his job, any one of which would have proved sufficient. In the end, his portfolio was far too vast for him to be able to properly execute any part of it. While his colleagues recognized his inability to perform all of the tasks he had undertaken, no one, including his President, was willing to reshape his job to leaner dimensions. Once created, momentum favored the continuation of his job even though he was not performing it well. In the end, a job has to have a basic element to it. “I knew going in that I was going to be judged successful or a failure based on the core job I held: which was servicing the President on a personal basis, tracking the paper going in and out of that office. Being the traffic cop,” said James Cicconi who served as Staff Secretary to President Bush. Most jobs are similar in that they hold an identifiable set of responsibilities and priorities. Yet the importance of identifying clear responsibilities for each position is a reality not appreciated by many as they assemble their new team members.

¹⁴ Interview with William Galston, June 5, 1997, College Park, Maryland.

¹⁵ Interview with Michael McCurry, June 10, 1997, Washington, D.C.

¹⁶ Interview with William Galston, June 5, 1997, College Park, Maryland.

THE SOLUTION

THE WHITE HOUSE INTERVIEW AND MATERIALS PROJECT

Former White House staff members and people in the governmental and scholarly communities believe a program led by a group of informed presidency scholars would bring something new to the table of transitions: an objective body of information assembled by people who can serve as fair arbiters and interpreters of previous transitions. The keys to a successful program will be:

- **White House Staff Interviews.** A rigorously prepared set of interviews conducted by experienced and knowledgeable presidency scholars with a full and representative cross section of White House staff members.
- **Analytical Materials.** Once we have a base of interviews with former staff members, we can then analyze the information and provide incoming staff members with information and materials they seek as they start their work.
- **Flexible Delivery System.** The information delivery system must be a flexible one. A website with interview information and research materials can be tailored to the needs of transition and White House people.
- **Professional Services.** A corps of professional people servicing our program, including those in non-governmental institutions working in the areas of publicity, university management, computer technology and operations, scholarship, and those in governmental institutions, such as the National Archives and the presidential library system.
- **Assistance From Former White House Staff.** Assistance from former staff members who can develop support for our program among their colleagues and who can make us aware of the information needs of an incoming team and how they will best access it.
- **Financial Support for the Program.** Adequate financial support to create the interview base and to develop the materials flowing from it.

WHITE HOUSE STAFF INTERVIEWS

In preparing to govern, those coming into power need access to an institutional memory. While no such formal device exists, there are numerous people who hold information on how transitions have worked and how White Houses have been organized. In the full proposal we will submit to you in early January, we will propose to conduct a series of interviews with White House officials in which we will document the actions, operations, decisions, and structure of administrations since 1969. With the appropriate funding, we plan to conduct interviews with approximately 378 current and former White House officials representing the key offices and posts in the White House since Richard Nixon became President. Our study begins in 1969 as the Nixon Administration represents the beginning of the modern organizational structure of a White House. It was Richard Nixon who created or developed the White House external relations operations, including the Office of Communications, the Office of Public Liaison, and the Office of Political Affairs. Since his administration, the position and office of Chief of Staff has been found as a feature in every White House, even though not through all of the years of an administration.

Presidency scholars experienced in interviewing White House officials will conduct the sessions with former staff members. In addition to the interviews I will conduct in my position as Project Director, there will be a corps of people here in Washington and available regionally around the country who will interview the staff with whom we choose to speak. The interview protocols will be developed by presidency scholars. Working through a committee of political scientists associated with the Presidency Research Group, the assembled scholars will develop a list of questions to be asked of staff across administrations. The questions will be designed to elicit information on the nature of the transition and of the early months in an administration and, at the same time, to develop a full and accurate record of the actions, people, decisions, and operations of the six administrations whose White Houses we study. Through a comparison of the responses of people in different administrations, we can develop a sense of the rhythms of a White House and, once the interviews are brought together, we can analyze and identify the organizational and behavioral patterns to be found there.

ANALYTICAL MATERIALS

Working from the interviews we conduct with officials, we will develop information on the offices the incoming staff members will assume, the decisions that typically await them through the course of their first year, and subjects identified by former staff as of particular interest to those coming into office, such as common mistakes made by a new White House team, how they should deal with the press, and how ethical considerations should shape their work. We will provide incoming staff with information on who previously served in their jobs and give them the phone numbers and addresses of those people. Former White House staff have been particularly keen on our providing such a service to the incoming people. “Knowing who the right people were that held your job in the past is a big help, remarked Michael Jackson. By providing people with materials to read and the names of people they can talk with who are familiar with the contours of their jobs, we will facilitate establishing relationships for the new people to draw on when the weather gets heavy at the White House. “What you want is not only some walking in knowledge, but when you’re suddenly faced with a decision you’re not quite sure how to do, the ability to talk to someone privately,” noted David Gergen. “That’s why I’m suggesting that this is such a face-to-face kind of business and so few people read who come into these kind of jobs that I think the best combination normally combines reading and actual talking time.”

The Project Director will be responsible for translating the interview information into materials useful for organizing a White House. Using presidential scholars involved in the interviewing process and graduate students hired to work on gathering materials tailored to the interests and needs of incoming staff, we can provide the necessary materials to the staff members who need them.

The types of information we will assemble is set in the context of the types of analysis we will provide: structural, temporal, decision-making, and subject analysis.

- **Structural Analysis.** This category of information targets information on the operation of White House offices and organizational patterns associated with individual posts. We will go through each of the top level posts, e.g. Chief of Staff, Press Secretary, as well as the central offices found in the White House organizational structure, among them will be the Press Office, Legislative Affairs, Communications, National Security Council. We will go over how the offices have been organized over the years and what functions they have carried out at different times and what the determinants are of how they organize, e.g. partisan control of the White House, goals of an administration. Organizational charts can be included here or in the reference materials.

- **Temporal Analysis.** This category will have decision-making information set in the context of the rhythms of a year. “One of the main things we were working on in the transition was a time line in terms of when various things had to be done,” said Edwin Harper about the Reagan transition work. We will lay out what decisions and opportunities are typically associated with each time of the year and all years in a term, e.g. domestic policy early in a presidential term when he and the Congress are focusing on such issues, general themes associated with the commencement season, foreign and economic policy with G-7 in the summer and the UN speech in the fall, and budget issues in fall. Knowing what is ahead for a President and his White House makes it far easier to begin planning for the future rather than constantly getting stuck in the present. We will define and describe the typical decisions facing a new team as its members walk in the White House door on January 20th and then follow them through the term.
- **Decision-Making Analysis.** Closely aligned with the above category, we will look at the fixed and malleable aspects of White House decision-making. What decisions will they have little control over when they first take office (budget decisions) and what actions are they fairly free to guide as they wish. This area will lean heavily on case material of previous administrations and where they found little area to maneuver. Incoming staff will be particularly interested in material highlighting specific decisions made by their predecessors.
- **Subject Analysis.** Here we will tackle subjects important to their tenure and let them know the dynamics of the issue or subject and highlight its practical aspects. Among the subjects we can include are: ethics issues, press relations, presidential communications. This is an area where we could present “White House Horror Stories,” a subject that former staff members say is a critical one to cover and one of great interest to an incoming team. One former staff member suggested we “call each of the presidential libraries and say, ‘Here are fifteen topics about which we know that you are going to have to provide guidance to White House staff. Let’s just go pull the Counsel’s memo for each of the five administrations and see what they saw,’” suggested Michael Jackson. “Was there subtly different advice given by one or the other? That allows people to hit the ground running before they take office with fifteen of these things in place, so you can say, ‘Okay. Here’s your first day on the job.’” The work we are doing aims at bringing together information useful to the new staff. “Through an academic project of this sort that you’re contemplating, some real useful information of that sort [can be] collected, gathered, and organized in a way so that you can say here’s this, here’s that.”

Interim Report: Standards for a Successful Start. At the end of 1999 or in early January 2000, we will present interim findings stressing the importance of the White House staff decisions to be made down the road by the winner of the presidential election. By so doing, we will try to raise awareness among the political elite of the issue of the importance of a smooth start for an administration and at the same time get the attention of reporters who are gearing up for the primary season. The early days of the primary season spent in Iowa and New Hampshire are often ones where reporters are searching for information provoking interesting responses from the candidates. We can raise the issue of the quality of an administration’s start and see if it has resonance in the campaign.

As we conduct our analysis of our presidential materials, we will isolate between 8 and 10 points critical to a successful start of an administration. They can serve as standards used to measure the success of a White House in its early months. If there is an interest in such standards among news organizations, then the candidates and those working in their camps will have to think through the importance of the early months. Since President Clinton had such a poor start and Carter began in a weak fashion as well, reporters and elected officials are familiar with the cost of their early failures as well as those of earlier presidents, such as

the failed Bay of Pigs invasion undertaken by President Kennedy in his third month in office. All represent cautionary tales emphasizing the need to be prepared to govern, not extend the campaign.

DELIVERY SYSTEMS

We will design an information delivery system for incoming staff to meet their needs for flexibility and ease of access to the system.

Website. With the aide of a variety of professional operations and institutions, we will prepare a website with information brought together from our interviews, relevant documents from presidential libraries, materials from secondary sources, audio and visual materials from presidential libraries and from various video archives. In addition to preparing materials for delivery to staff through secure computer access, we will also provide materials to a larger audience through a public website.

The computer based delivery system will be a hybrid resource combining audio and visual materials on a CD-ROM with textual materials presented on a website. Should technological resources make it possible, we will provide as much material as we can on the web portion of the delivery system. Since it offers the opportunity to make continual changes in its text, a website has important advantages when a project is dependent on providing current information. At the same time, a CD-ROM will allow us to provide staff with film and other materials in which former White House officials discuss the dimensions of their work. Additionally, the website is an appropriate venue to present supporting material from a variety of sources. Documents from the presidential libraries will be placed on the website as will the observations found in memoirs of former White House staff members, such as selected passages from the several works published by press secretaries and chiefs of staff. "That would be a great idea," said Harrison Wellford about the use of a website. "That's a whole new resource we didn't have before," observed Wellford, who has prepared materials for candidates in four presidential campaigns.."

Public Events. During the three year period of the proposed project, we will present our analysis to an interested scholarly and media audience. As the presidential campaign heats up, for example, we will hold events that highlight our findings. Our aim is to persuade the candidates and their staffs to focus on issues of governing as they debate their fitness for presidential office. The release of our Standards for a Successful Start will occur in a public setting, most likely in a forum held at a presidential library centered around former White House staff members, or at an event held in New Hampshire or Iowa during the early weeks of 2000.

PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES

Our ability to effectively deliver our materials to the White House staff and to a wider audience during the course of the presidential campaign in 2000 is enhanced by the professional groups and individuals who have offered us their services. We have a strong base of institutions and individuals with expertise in the areas where we need support. Among the institutions proffering their services are the following: the National Archives, individual presidential libraries, The Academy of Leadership at the University of Maryland, Sunsite Microsystems and the University of North Carolina, C-Span, Powell Tate. Our resources run a continuum from public institutions providing housing and distribution for our work to a private public relations firm with plans to disseminate our information during the three years our project is underway.

A brief sketch of each of the institutions provides a sense of what services each offers and how they fit together as a group.

The members of the **Presidency Research Group** will conduct the interviews. Among those who have offered their services are several past presidents of the Presidency Research Group and the winners of the Richard E. Neustadt award, the most prestigious prize for a book on the presidency. This group includes: Erwin Hargrove, George Edwards, Karen Hult, Bert Rockman, Sam Kernell, Larry Berman, and Charles Jones.

The **Academy of Leadership** at the University of Maryland will manage the day to day operation of the grant and the program, including organizing the interviews, assembling research materials, and handling and accounting for the funds received and spent. As the Program Director, I will work out of the Academy.

The **National Archives** will serve as a site where we can introduce our program to a media audience and to an interested public. A symbol of the authenticity of information, the National Archives is an appropriate setting to introduce a program designed to build an institutional memory of a key governmental institution. It will also be the site where we present our summary findings at the program's end in the Spring of 2001. In addition, the Archives will be the final depository for the interviews once the transcripts are complete and ready to be made available.

Additionally, **Presidential Libraries** will be part of the process by identifying information needs, locating illustrative memoranda we can use to complement points made in our interviews, and providing technical and expert advice. Additionally, information developed from the program might usefully serve as a base for conferences put on by the libraries.

Sunsite Microsystems and the University of North Carolina will provide the technical support for the websites we operate for incoming White House staff and for scholars and others, including reporters, who use our material to prepare information during the campaign as well as during the transition period and in the early months of the presidential term. As advanced a computer operation as exists in a university setting, Sunsite has offered us the generous support of its personnel and the availability of its state-of-the-art computer system. Professor Terry Sullivan, who will serve as the Research Coordinator, will operate the computer system from his base at the University of North Carolina and be responsible for the development of the computer based delivery system.

C-Span is currently working on the development of visual materials relevant to our project. Professor Robert Browning is going through their video base to identify tapes relating to our needs. C-Span occasionally offers programs analyzing governmental institutions. For example, it recently ran a one hour program on the National Security Council and its fifty year history, including the different organizational shapes it has had. Three advisers, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Alexander Haig, and Sandy Berger, discussed their notions of the dimensions of the job, including their relations with their presidents and how they perceived their duties.

Powell Tate will provide us with expertise in dealing with the national news media. The only publicity firm in Washington headed by two former White House staff members specializing in communications issues, Jody Powell, Press Secretary to President Carter and Sheila Tate, Press Secretary to Nancy Reagan, Powell Tate has offered to provide advice on how we might effectively draw attention to our findings, including the importance of focusing on governing during the presidential campaign and early in the transition period. With representatives of both Republican and Democratic White Houses, Powell Tate offers a special brand of expertise in advancing issues of governance.

ASSISTANCE FROM FORMER WHITE HOUSE STAFF MEMBERS

One of the key ingredients of a successful White House Interview Program will be the cooperation of former staff members. Across parties and administrations, we have received offers of support for the program. Support includes a willingness of people to be interviewed for the project and to take part in events associated with the project. Additionally, former staff indicate they will provide us with information on what types of materials will be useful to staff, to identify when information can be effectively delivered to transition and White House staff, and to encourage their colleagues to participate in the interview program.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR THE PROGRAM

At the end of the year, we will submit to The Pew Charitable Trusts our proposal for developing and implementing our White House Interview Program. In our July 29th Letter of Inquiry, we suggested a budget of approximately \$784,427 to be spent over a three year period. In the interim, we are working on developing cost estimates and on identifying the resources and institutions that can provide us with appropriate support.

PREPARING THE WHITE HOUSE STAFF TO GOVERN A TIMELY PROJECT DESIGNED TO ENHANCE PRESIDENTIAL EFFECTIVENESS

Since most administrations learn the lessons of the administration directly preceding their own, perhaps we are addressing the issue of the importance of an effective start at a time when many people will be ready to listen. “The bumpiness of the early Clinton days is now such a staple of conversation that I think people might be willing to try [your program],” said David Gergen.¹⁷ “I think you’ve got your best shot now, coming off the Clinton problems,” Gergen predicted. This administration as well as several that preceded it demonstrate the difficulties in shifting the government from campaigning to governing. If an incoming staff team can seize the momentum and make it respond to their needs, the transition provides a President an excellent opportunity to make an effective passage from campaigning to governing. There are almost three months in which they can wind up their campaign and focus on the work they have ahead as they assume office. And as they assume office, they have an additional three months where good will generally abounds. Easy as it seems, however, momentum born of a campaign of at least two years often dictates otherwise. A campaign is somewhat like a ocean going freighter that must be slowed and turned towards the officers’ chosen course. It requires space, planning, thought, and trained people.

Even at this early stage in the process of building the White House Interview Program, the key ingredients for a successful program are available to us. All over Washington people who once worked in the White House are ready to help those who will follow them into office in 2001. With information that will be useful to the new team and an effective support operation in place, we can deliver to the incoming staff material that will help them successfully acclimate to their new posts much earlier than they would otherwise without our program. In addition, knowing what is ahead for them will help the new staff members plan out their policy and political futures in a more effective manner than if they were unaware of the recurring events and patterns they will find once they get to their desks. Those empty desks need to be filled with information that many former staff members are anxious to provide them.

¹⁷ Interview with David Gergen, June 24, 1997, Washington, D.C.

ABOUT THE WHITE HOUSE 2001 PROJECT

<http://whitehouse2001.org>

Presidency scholars lead a two-part project designed to provide incoming White House staff members with information on operating key White House offices and to help presidential nominees fill out the tidal wave of forms they face in the appointments process. Funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, a foundation known for the stature of its programs and the nonpartisan nature of its organization, the White House 2001 Project works with two broad, Pew initiatives: The Transition to Governing Project of the American Enterprise Institute and the Presidential Appointee Initiative of the Brookings Institution. White House 2001 was designed and developed by the board and members of the Presidency Research Group, the worldwide professional organization of scholars focused on the American presidency and a section of the American Political Science Association.

THE WHITE HOUSE INTERVIEW PROGRAM

Unlike corporations both large and small, a White House begins without a record compiled by its previous occupants. The goal of the White House Interview Program is to smooth the path to power by furnishing incoming staff with substantive information about the operation of seven White House offices critical to an effective beginning: Chief of Staff, Staff Secretary, Press Office, Office of Communications, Office of the Counsel to the President, Office of Management and Administration, and the Office of Presidential Personnel. Through interviews with current and former White House staff members from the last six administrations, the White House Interview Program provides new staff with detailed information about how their White House offices function, the organization of their units, and the roles played by the heads of each office.

In addition to this institutional memory, the White House Interview Program provides a support package of important tools previous staff have identified as invaluable. These tools include a “rolodex” of contact information about the people who previously served in their posts with current addresses and phone numbers. The White House Interview Program also provides the first ever detailed organization charts of White House offices approximately every six months through the Carter administration. The scholars associated with the project, researching and writing about the White House staff, are nationally recognized for their work on the presidency. They are: Professors Peri Arnold, MaryAnne Borrelli, John Burke, George Edwards, Karen Hult, Nancy Kassop, John Kessel, Martha Joynt Kumar, Bradley Patterson, James Pffifner, Terry Sullivan, Kathryn Dunn Tenpas, Charles Walcott, Shirley Anne Warshaw, and Stephen Wayne.

NOMINATION FORMS ONLINE

In order to address the volume of information required from appointees and the problem of the plethora of forms to be filled out by nominees, the *Nomination Forms Online* program provides a software package that nominees can use to complete the myriad of forms required by the White House, the FBI, the US Office of Government Ethics, and, where appropriate, the Senate committee of jurisdiction. The software uses innovative programming techniques so that the software distributes repetitive information across the several forms nominees must complete. The software allows the nominee to store information for future use in completing annual reports. It also makes available a portable file of data in standard formats so the nominee can share information, at his or her discretion, with the White House Office of Presidential Personnel and other agencies. Nomination Forms Online is freeware.

THE WHITE HOUSE 2001 PROJECT REPORT SERIES

available in PDF format (as noted) from: <http://whitehouse2001.org>

GENERAL SERIES

This collection of reports from the White House 2001 Project describe topics of general concern to White House operations. Those in the general series marked with an asterisk (*) are currently only available to the Presidential Transition Team.

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| 1. Opportunities and Hazards – The White House Interview Program | 6. The White House World – Start Up, Organization, and the Pressures of Work Life* |
| 2. Meeting the Freight Train Head On – Planning for the Presidential Transition | 7. A Guide to Inquiry* |
| 3. Lessons from Past Transitions | 8. Analyzing Questionnaires – Executive Forms for Nominees* |
| 4. A Tale of Two Transitions: 1980 and 1988 | |
| 5. The Presidency and the Political Environment* | |

WHITE HOUSE STAFF SERIES

This collection of reports from the White House 2001 Project create an “institutional memory” for the White House Staff. Currently, these reports are available only to the Presidential Transition Team. Look for a release of these reports in the Spring of 2001.

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| 21. Office of the Chief of Staff | 31. Press Office |
| 22. Organization Charts for the Office of Chief of Staff | 32. Organization Charts for the Press Office |
| 23. Office of the Staff Secretary | 33. Office of Communications |
| 24. Organization Charts for the Office of the Staff Secretary | 34. Organization Charts for the Office of Communications |
| 25. Office of Management and Administration | |
| 26. Organization Charts for the Office of Management and Administration | |
| 27. Office of Presidential Personnel | |
| 28. Organization Charts for the Office of Presidential Personnel | |
| 29. Office of Counsel to the President | |
| 30. Organization Charts for the Office of Counsel to the President | |